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Terrorists and Freedom Fighters

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"'Unbounded' morality ultimately becomes counterproductive even in terms of the same moral principles being sought. The law of diminishing returns applies to morality."
Thomas Sowell

There's a story about Robespierre that has the preeminent rabble-rouser of the French Revolution leaping up from his chair as soon as he saw a mob assembling outside.

"I must see which way the crowd is headed", he is reputed to have said: "For I am their leader."
http://www.salon.com/tech/books/1999/11/04/new_optimism/

People who exercise violence in the pursuit of what they hold to be just causes are alternately known as "terrorists" or "freedom fighters". Ironically, the word "terrorist" was first applied by the French during the Revolution to the most fervent adherents of equality, fraternity, and liberty: the Jacobins.

They all share a few common characteristics:

1. A hard core of idealists adopt a cause (in most cases, the freedom of a group of people). They base their claims on history - real or hastily concocted, on a common heritage, on a language shared by the members of the group and, most important, on hate and contempt directed at an "enemy". The latter is, almost invariably, the physical or cultural occupier of space the idealists claim as their own.

2. The loyalties and alliances of these people shift effortlessly as ever escalating means justify an ever shrinking cause. The initial burst of grandiosity inherent in every such undertaking gives way to cynical and bitter pragmatism as both enemy and people tire of the conflict.

3. An inevitable result of the realpolitik of terrorism is the collaboration with the less savoury elements of society. Relegated to the fringes by the inexorable march of common sense, the freedom fighters naturally gravitate towards like minded non-conformists and outcasts. The organization is criminalized. Drug dealing, bank robbing and other manner of organized and contumacious criminality become integral extensions of the struggle. A criminal corporatism emerges, structured but volatile and given to internecine donnybrooks.

4. Very often an un-holy co-dependence develops between the organization and its prey. It is the interest of the freedom fighters to have a contemptible and tyrannical regime

as their opponent. If not prone to suppression and convulsive massacres by nature - acts of terror will deliberately provoke even the most benign rule to abhorrent ebullition.

5. The terrorist organization will tend to emulate the very characteristics of its enemy it fulminates against the most. Thus, all such groups are rebarbatively authoritarian, execrably violent, devoid of human empathy or emotions, suppressive, ostentatious, trenchant and often murderous.

6. It is often the freedom fighters who compromise their freedom and the freedom of their people in the most egregious manner. This is usually done either by collaborating with the derided enemy against another, competing set of freedom fighters - or by inviting a foreign power to arbiter. Thus, they often catalyse the replacement of one regime of oppressive horror with another, more terrible and entrenched.

7. Most freedom fighters are assimilated and digested by the very establishment they fought against or as the founders of new, privileged nomenklaturas. It is then that their true nature is exposed, mired in gulosity and superciliousness as they become. Inveterate violators of basic human rights, they often transform into the very demons they helped to exorcise.

Most freedom fighters are disgruntled members of the middle classes or the intelligentsia. They bring to their affairs the merciless ruthlessness of sheltered lives. Mistaking compassion for weakness, they show none as they unscrupulously pursue their self-aggrandizement, the ego trip of sending others to their death. They are the stuff martyrs are made of. Borne on the crests of circumstantial waves, they lever their unbalanced personalities and project them to great effect. They are the footnotes of history that assume the role of text. And they rarely enjoy the unmitigated support of the very people they proffer to liberate. Even the most harangued and subjugated people find it hard to follow or accept the vicissitudinal behaviour of their self-appointed liberators, their shifting friendships and enmities and their pasilaly of violence.

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